

July 12, 1999

Michael Friedman
Lead Deputy Commissioner
United States Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 1471
Rockville, MD 20857

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Re: FDA proposal to remove Labeling of irradiated food products

Dear Mr. Friedman:

I am writing to register my opposition to the FDA proposal to eliminate the labeling of poultry, meat, vegetables and other food products that have been irradiated to prolong shelf life and kill food-borne pathogens. I am against this proposal for several reasons, not the least of which is that it would deprive people of important information about their food supply. There are unresolved questions about the wisdom of irradiating food, the potential for harmful contamination, and the effects on the nutritive value of the foods treated in this manner. It seems to me that I have a fundamental right to that information when making personal dietary choices.

I do not believe that the push for food irradiation is driven by public health and safety concerns. Rather, I suspect that agri-business corporations, whose relentless quest for profits leads to unsanitary processes and practices, are hoping that food irradiation will be a quick fix for the consequences of an increasingly industrialized food supply system. I for one am not interested in nourishing myself or my family on sterilized filth.

I also believe that food irradiation is seen by the ailing nuclear industry in this country as a way to prolong its steady demise, by finding "useful" applications for the radioactive wastes that it produces. I want no part of this, and I believe that most Americans also will reject this – if they have full access to the information. To illustrate this point, I draw your attention to a poll commissioned by the American Association of Retired Persons and the Center for Science in the Public Interest. This poll, conducted this past April indicated that 88.6 percent of Americans favor labeling of irradiated food. Another poll conducted in 1997 by CBS News found that 73 percent of the public opposes irradiation, and 77 percent of the public would not eat irradiated food.

To my way of thinking, bringing radioactive wastes and food processing together goes against common sense. It makes no sense to increase the risk of release of radioactive cobalt-60 and cesium-137 by transporting it from Department of Energy facilities to irradiation facilities, when there are other, far less costly and safer methods of food sterilization that could be developed. In my view, this is not in the long term public health, safety or environmental interest. It does, however, seem to be in the corporate interest. Which do you serve?

I request that you reply to my letter, and inform me of what position the FDA will take with respect to this issue.

Yours,


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